

Exploitation of Construal Operations in the Analysis of Descriptive Poetry

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Abstract

One of the most fundamental properties of a beautiful portrait is the accuracy of showing more details of the scene. The skillful painter is that who has the ability to reflect the scene with all its details in their portrait. The skillful poet is a skillful painter but with words rather than paints. In a descriptive poem, the poet depicts a scene with most of its details as if the listener or reader sees it. This area of poetry has not received sophisticated studies within a linguistic framework, so the current study comes to contribute to this field. Cognitive linguistics is an appropriate field that can provide workable tools of analysis because its theses, specially embodiment, have great deal with how reality will be reflected in language and cognition. This paper aims to formulate a model to analyze such kind of poetry. It adopts, with minor modification, Langaker's construal principles to analyze Ibn Hisn's Poem 'The Dove'. These principles are mainly oriented to how the human beings conceptualize reality, especially the visual environment. The current study arrives at a conclusion that the poem, the dove, is highly descriptive in its all aspects. It sticks to a single scene in which all the tackled scopes belong to a single general scope. The poet gives details about the major concepts being described and draws nearly all the small parts of the view which represent a high degree of resolution.

Keywords: Construal Operations, Descriptive Poetry, Cognitive Grammar

1. Introduction

One of the main types of poetry is the descriptive poetry (DP). One of the landmarks of this type is its relationship with the visual environment. The poet tries to convey more details about a scene in a poetic way. It seems the classical linguistic tools are not enough to analyze the poem from this perspective. Recently, Cognitive Grammar (CG) has provided the field of linguistics with a new perspective by relating language to all other human cognitive activities and faculties. One of the cores in CG is how the human being construe and conceptualize reality, especially the visual reality. This area of poetry has not received sophisticated studies within a linguistic framework, so the current study comes to contribute to this field. Cognitive linguistics is an appropriate field that can provide workable tools of analysis because its theses, specially embodiment, have great deal with how reality will be reflected in language and cognition. This paper aims to formulate a model to analyze such kind of poetry. The descriptive poem, *the dove*, from the Andalusian poetry will be analyzed in this study as an example.

The study can be based on the following questions: (1) How can construal operations be exploited as analytical tools for DP? (2) What are the most prominent and workable operations that can be employed in this context? (3) What are the main aspects of the Dove poem that reflect its descriptivability. The current paper aims to build a bridge between CG and DP through the construal principles in order to show how descriptive poets can reflect the detailed scenes in their poems. The paper suggests a model of analysis as a tool for

analyzing DP by employing and redefining the principles of construal. It consists of four steps. The first step is *Elaboration* which measures the ability of the poet to specify the described entity by giving more details about it. Second, *Resolution* is this step which is about how the poet depicts the small and accurate parts of the scene. Third, *Focal Adjustment* is the step which tackles whether the poet covers all the scene through his description. The last step is *Relatedness* in which the poet gauges the unity of the poem subject. All of these steps group to estimate to which extent the poem is descriptive. These steps are applied to a descriptive poem, *the dove*, from the Andalusian poetry.

2. Construal in Cognitive Grammar

Cognitive Grammar (CG) is one of the grammars that have abandoned the classical way of thinking about language. It has omitted all the traditional boundaries between language components and language and other aspects of cognition. It is pioneered by Langacker (1987, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1999, 2002 and 2008). One of the central aspects of this grammar is *construal*. Evans (2007: 40-1) defines construal as the way that the speaker chooses to encode conceptual representation by language. Utterances in turn evoke consequences in the hearer's mind for the conceptual representation. Achievement of this process passes through a specific "focal adjustment" and "organizing" the conceptualized scene, linguistically, in a particular way. For instance, the differences between the active and passive constructions regarding 'focus'. The active construction draws the attention to the agent, while the passive concentrates on the patient. The two constructions construe the same scene differently. Croft and Cruse (2004: 103) mentions that "it is by means of a series of processes of construal that an essentially non-semantic purport is transformed into fully contextualized meanings." Meaning of an expression is not only a matter of evoking conceptual content, but also the way of construing that content.

Langacker (2008: 55-85) indicates that construing a scene depends on four aspects. First, the closeness between the conceptualizer and the scene; he uses the term *specificity* for this aspect. Second, which part of the scene the viewer chooses to look at, *focus*. Third, to which element in the scene the conceptualizer pays more attention, *prominence*. Fourth, the point from which the viewer looks, *perspective*. Langacker explains specificity in terms of *schematicity* and *granularity*. Schematicity refers to a general description of a situation while granularity indicates more specific or detailed description. For example, *temperature* and *rat* can be described schematically as *hot* and *rodent*, and in terms of granularity, as *95 degrees* (or more specific *95,2 degrees*) and *large brown rat*.

Croft and Cruse (2004: 103) present focusing in terms of *foreground* vs. *background* and *scope* which are categorized within the concept of *selection*. In construing a scene, specific elements are foregrounded and others are backgrounded. On the other hand, the concept of 'scope' can be understood through of two aspects of selection. First, any chosen expression provides access to specific domains or scopes. Second, within a given scope, the selected expression highlights a particular area. For instance, the word *elbow* grants access to the broader domain of human body. However, it is clear that this word is not defined by

the general domain as a whole. Instead, within that domain, the word primarily relates to the arm.

Langacker (2008) assumes that focusing is closely linked to, and can be analyzed through, the concept of *prominence*. Prominence is explained in terms of *profiling* and *trajector and landmark alignment*. An expression highlights a specific area of the conceptual content, which forms the foundation of its meaning. Langacker refers to this highlighted area as the *base*. The base represents the direct domain accessed by the expression within the broader activated domain. Within the base, focus is directed to a particular part, known as the *profile*. For example, the word *elbow* activates the general domain of the human body, which serves as its maximal domain. From this domain, the word selects a specific scope—the *arm*—as the base for its meaning. Within this scope, *elbow* profiles or refers to a very specific part. Profiling is not limited to nouns but also applies to verbs, relationships, and other linguistic elements. Prominence plays a key role in profiling relationships, where participants are distinguished by varying degrees of prominence. One participant, known as the trajector (TR), is more prominent than the other, referred to as the landmark (LM). The classification of participants as TR or LM depends on *focal prominence*, whether primary or secondary, rather than on their semantic roles.

The final aspect of construal is *perspective*, which refers to the viewpoint from which the conceptualizer interprets a scene. This is a feature of *focal adjustment*. According to Evans and Green (2006: 541), the viewpoint from which a scene is construed is linked to the prominence of its elements. Langacker (2008) explains that grammatical functions, such as subject and object, reflect perspective and have a conceptual foundation. The subject is described as an “active energy source (AGENT),” transferring energy to the object, which is characterized as “an energy sink (PATIENT).” The subject is often considered the trajector (TR) because it is dynamic, while the object is regarded as the landmark (LM) due to its static and stationary nature. However, the classification of TR (subject) and LM (object) depends on perspective. For instance, in passive sentences, where the perspective shifts, the object becomes the TR, and the subject takes on the role of the LM.

3. A Construal Based Model

Recent studies, such as Harrison et al. (2014), have utilized aspects of cognitive grammar to analyze literary texts. This approach aligns with that trend but incorporates some distinctions. It is specifically designed to assess descriptive potential (DP) in poetry, evaluating the extent to which a poem is descriptive. The model is rooted in Langacker's cognitive grammar, particularly the concept of "construal." It outlines four analytical steps, each examining the poem from a unique perspective, yet ultimately working towards a unified objective.

3.1. Elaboration

This step is grounded in Langacker's construal aspect of "specificity." At times, a poet may depict a scene using general or schematic characteristics. Such descriptions are less likely to capture the reader's or listener's attention, as a scene described in vague terms tends to appear

indistinct. The more detailed a poem is, the more engaging it becomes. A poem is considered more descriptive when it provides richer details about the entity being portrayed. Even within a single poem, some lines may be more descriptive than others. For instance, a poet might describe a *summer night* simply as a *warm night*. This can be expanded to include elaborated details, such as a *moonlit warm night*. Further elaboration could describe it as a *moonlit worm night where sky is full with stars and the spread smooth stones reflect moonbeams*.

Poets often use some linguistic and conceptual tools, such as similes and metaphors, to provide more precise descriptions. Describing something in terms of another or drawing similarities between the features of two entities helps clarify the subject or idea the poet seeks to convey. This is particularly effective when discussing abstract concepts by relating them to concrete ones. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain that people tend to understand abstract ideas through concrete or physical experiences, as the latter are more specific and clearly defined. Employing metaphors and similes not only enhances clarity but also reduces the need for extensive descriptive language, as they effectively convey multiple features of the concept being described.

3.2. Resolution

The term "resolution" originates from computer science, where it refers to the ability of a screen to display a clear image based on the size and number of pixels in a photo. In this context, the concept is closely tied to the previous step and is derived from Langacker's idea of "profiling." A highly descriptive poem tends to focus on finer and more precise details. Profiling involves highlighting specific areas within a broader domain, as illustrated by the example of "elbow" in the earlier section. Here, the focus is on whether the poem's expressions capture both small details and larger elements of the scene. The descriptions of the *summer night* in the previous step exemplify profiling by addressing both broad and minute aspects of the scene. For instance, the word *stone* highlights a small part within the larger domain of *ground*. Similarly, *moonbeam* activates the maximal domain of the *sky* and narrows it down to the *moon* as its intermediate base, ultimately profiling the specific part *beam* within that domain.

3.3. Focal Adjustment

Filming a scene requires the cameraman to shift the camera from one part of the scene to another to capture all its details. Similarly, the poet acts as a cameraman, but instead of using a camera, they use words. The poet transitions from describing one area to another within the real or imagined view they are exploring or envisioning. A poem becomes more descriptive when it encompasses a greater number of sub-scenes. This step draws on Langacker's concept of "perspective," as explained earlier. The process of focal adjustment, or shifting from one part to another, can be observed through changes in the trajector (TR) and landmark (LM). Since the TR is the most prominent element in a sentence, tracking it allows one to follow shifts in focus. The relationship between TR and LM typically aligns with that of doer and patient, subject and object, or subject and predicate. In the previous example *where sky is full with stars and the spread smooth stones reflect moonbeams*, the

first clause positions *the sky* as the TR and the stars as the LM. The poet then transitions to a new sub-scene in the next clause, where the TR shifts to *stones* and the LM becomes *moonbeams*, illustrating the movement of focus within the scene.

3.4. Relatedness

This step builds on Langacker's concept of "scope" and examines the unity of the poem's subject. To describe something effectively, a poet must maintain focus on it. A more descriptive poem remains centered on a general scene, with its lines portraying different aspects of that scene. The overarching topic of the poem activates a primary scope, while individual expressions or groups of expressions activate specific sub-scopes. This step assesses the connections between these activated scopes and their relation to the maximal scope of the poem's main topic. When the scopes are interconnected, it shows that the poet is concentrating on a single general scene, resulting in a more precise description. In the example of *the summer night*, the scopes activated by expressions such as moonlit, *warm night*, *sky*, *stars*, and *moonbeams* are clearly related to one another and collectively link back to the maximal scope of *the summer night*.

4. Data Description: Ibn Hisn's Poem "The Dove"

Abu'l Hasan 'Ali ibn Hisn is an Arab poet from Seville lived in the 11th century. He is one of the pioneers of the Andalusian DP. In his poem "The Dove" he follows many Arab poets in imagining the dove's cooing as if the dove cries because of the longing for a beloved. The dove in this poem reflects the poet's situation in missing his beloved. This poem is translated by Middleton & Garza-Falcón (1993).

<p>The Dove</p> <p>The surprise of my life: On a bough between Isle and river a dove Cooing, his collar Pistache green, lapis his breast, Neck shimmering and maroon His back and wingtips. Pupils of ruby, over them eyelids Of pearl flitted, trimmed with gold, Black the point Of his beak, like The tip of a reed Dipped in ink. On the arak bough, His throne, throat now hid In the fold of a wing, he rested. But he saw me weep. Scared by a sob On the bough he stood, Spread wings, beat them, Took as he flew my heart away. Where? I know not.</p>	<p>الحمام</p> <p>وما هاجني إلا ابن ورقاء هاتف على فتن بين الجزيرة والنهر مفستق طوق لازورد كلكل موشى الطلى أحوى القوادم والظهر أدار على الياقوت أجفان لؤلؤ وصاغ على الأجناف طوقاً من التبر حديث شيا المنقار داج كأنه شبا قلم من فضة مد في حبر توسد من فرع الأراك أربكة ومال على طي الجناح مع النحر وما رأى دمعي مراقاً أرابه بكائي فاستولى على الغصن النضر وحث جناحيه وصفق طائراً وطار بقلبي حيث طار ولا أدرى</p>
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5. Data Analysis: The Construal Operations of Ibn Hisn's Poem "The Dove"

5.1. Elaboration

In the first line the poet describes the position of the dove. He uses two prepositional phrases, *on a bough* and *between Isle and river*, as modifiers which specify its position precisely. Unlike the previous description of position, the situation of *cooing* is not described. This may be justified by the focus on the visual scene. In the second line, the poet describes the bird's color with some details involving all its body parts, because color is a prominent feature in doves. Its collar is not only *green*, the green is more specified by *pistache*. Its *breast* is also characterized by an accurate color, *lapis*. Its *neck* is depicted by being *shimmering* and its *back* and *wingtips* are *maroon*. In the third line, he continues his description by using two metaphors, *Pupils of ruby* and *eyelids Of pearl*. These metaphors compensate for many descriptive words by giving the precise shape and color of *pupils* and *eyelids*. In addition to the metaphor, *eyelids* are modified by other three modifiers that give more details about them, *flitted*, *trimmed* and *with gold*. The poet, then, looks at another area, the *beak* by describing its tip with a simile. Through the simile he gives two expressions as modifiers, *Like the tip of a reed* and *Dipped in ink*. Actually, this is a high level of providing details.

In the fifth line, the poet portraits the bird's body mode through three expressions: *throat now hid, in the fold of a wing* and *he rested*. The first two expressions depict accurately how the bird sits in which it is easy to the reader to imagine the situation where its throat is covered by the wing. In the third expression the poet concludes from the previous expressions that the bird is safe and comfortable. The poet situation is characterized or modified only by one verb, *weep*. But the bird's situation is reflected by rich details. It is *scared* because of the poet and this general term, *scare*, is revealed by a more specific term, *a sob*. Therefore, the dove decides to fly and the poem draws all its movements by four expressions, *on the bough, he stood, Spread wings and beat them*. One can conclude that the poem is rich with details in which the most terms are specified by different kinds of modifiers regarding the visual properties of the scene, as it is shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 The general concepts of the poem and their modifiers

General concept		Modifier 1	Modifier 2	Modifier 3	Modifier 4
The dove's position		On a bough	Between Isle and river a dove	On the arak bough	
cooing		Ø			
The bird's color	collar	pistache	green		
	breast	lapis			
	Neck	shimmering			
	Its back and wingtips	maroon			
Pupils		ruby			
eyelids		of pearl	flitted	trimmed	with gold
Beak		Black the point of his beak,	Like the tip of a reed	Dipped in ink	
The bird's body mode		throat now hid	In the fold of a wing,	he rested.	
The poet		weep			
When the bird saw the poet		Scared	by a sob		
The bird's movement		On the bough	he stood	Spread wings	beat them

5.2. Resolution

In terms of resolution, it is easy to see that although the whole scene is so limited, the poet shows many small details. This is so clear through the words that profile very small details in the scene. The poem contains words like *collar*, *breast*, *neck*, *back*, *wingtips*, *pupils*, *eyelids*, *beak*, *throat*, *the fold of a wing*. All of these nouns and noun phrases profile small parts within the domain of the bird's body. Within these small parts of the scene, the poet gives more resolution by stating the noun phrases, *black the point of his beak* and *the tip of a reed*, which profile a very small area in the domain of *beak*. The poem also includes some words or phrases that profile very accurate activities, such as *cooing*, *flitted*, *sob*, *dipped in ink* and *beat them*. It seems that this poem profiles many accurate or small areas and activities of the view. This means the high level of description the poem has.

5.3. Focal Adjustment

The scene consists of a natural setting in which a dove sits and a descriptor, the poet. The poem words will be the camera that shows the scene and the change in the TR and LM represent its moving. The poet starts with a panoramic view which consists of the dove as the TR because it is the most prominent entity and it is the doer that is modified by two prepositional phrases, *on a bough between* and *Isle and river*. The poet represents, the patient, the LM which fads as a background of the scene. After this panoramic view, the

camera moves rapidly to film many sub-scenes. In the next sentence the TR changes to be *his collar* which gives up its position because of the prominence of *his breast* (TR) in the following clause.

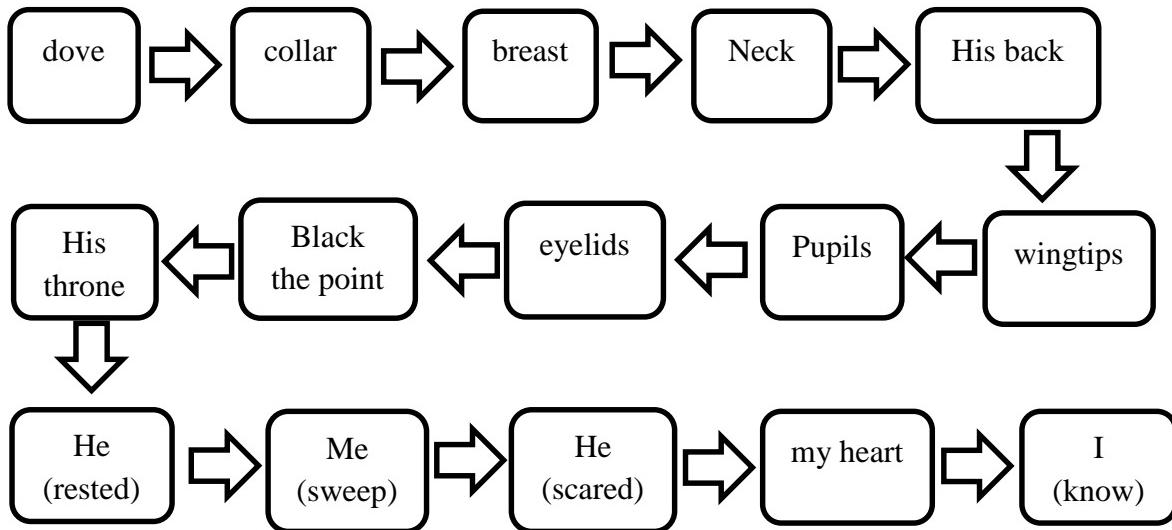


Figure 4.1 Tracing TR through the poem

It is better to continue tracing TR in a diagram, as in Figure 4.1. It is clear that this poem has a big number of sub-scenes which are reflected in the TR movements. This means that the descriptor shows all parts of the scene, therefore the poem is highly descriptive.

5.4. Relatedness

In terms of relatedness, it seems that the poem focuses on a single scene which consists of the dove and the poet in a natural context. The poet feels that he and the dove have the same feeling of sadness because of the departure of their beloved. Therefore, the main scopes of the poem, as in Figure 4.2, the scope of the descriptor (the poet), the scope of the described entity (the dove) and the point relationship between them (sadness). It is clear that all the sub-scopes are included

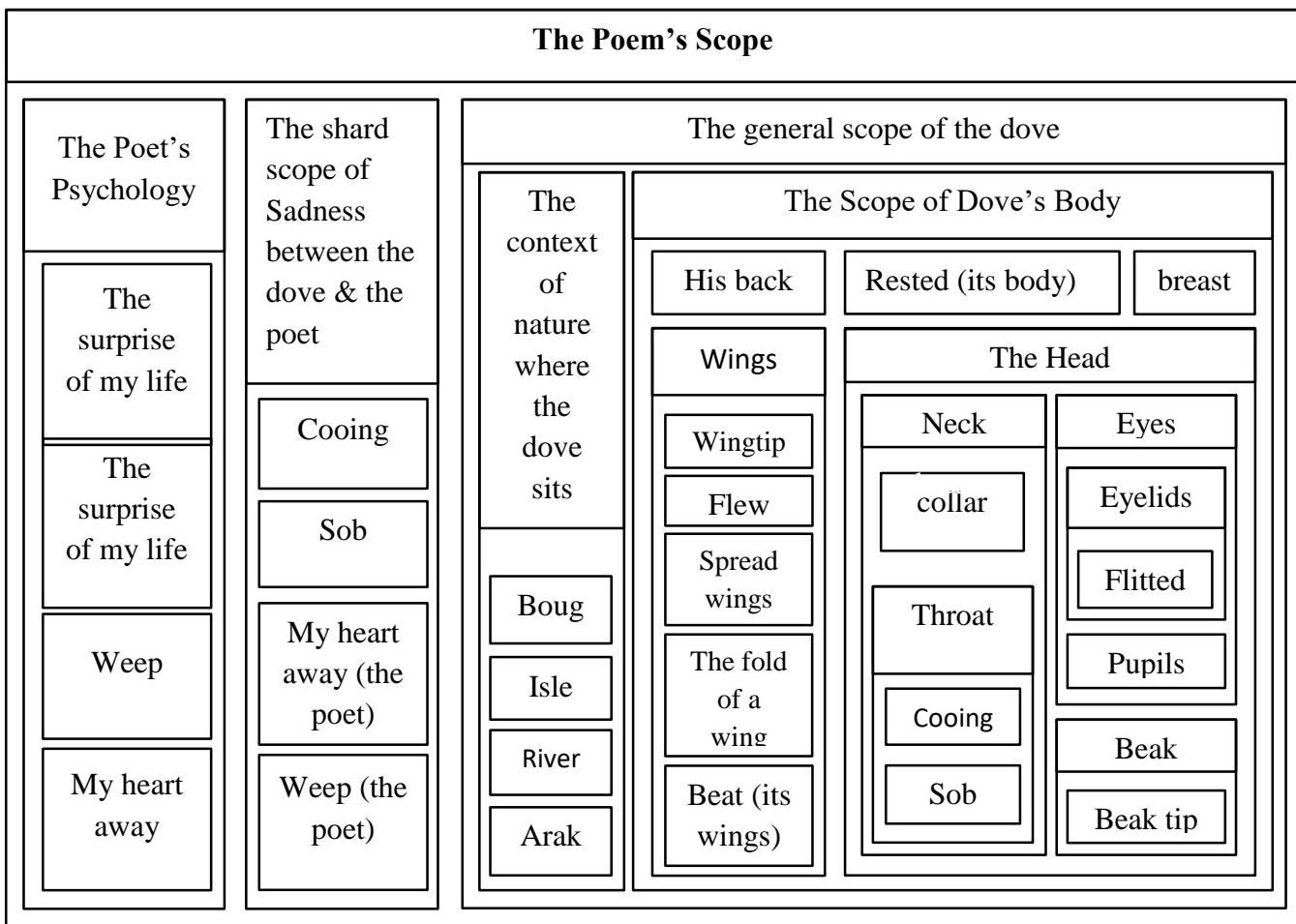


Figure 4.2 The Interrelated Scopes of the Poem

Within these three scopes. However, the majority of the sub-scenes are involved within the scope dove (the described entity) and this is required because it is the scene center. It seems that the poem has a high degree of relatedness and in turn highly descriptive.

6. Results and Discussion

The results show that the modal has integrated the four construal operations of cognitive grammar with some modifications and all of them have played central roles to tackle the poem from different sides. In terms of elaboration, the poet elaborated his scenes in the poem through extending them to include additional parts. In the Dove poem, the poet does not stop at describing the dove's shape, but enlarge the scene to involve its position, its feelings, and other related concepts. According to the resolution operations, all the parts of the scene are mentioned with many small details. In other words, the poet zooms the scene with all its details. The focal adjustment operation shows that the poem imagines the whole scene and because of the focus or zooming the poet moves from one part to another within the scene. The last operation indicates that all the concepts relate to each other in different ways from the right beginning of the poem until the end.

7. Conclusions

The conclusion is divided into two parts, the first is related to the model itself and the second to the poem, they are:

1. The model reflects the applicability of Cognitive Grammar to literature, especially DP. The principles of construal can play a good role in analyzing Descriptive Poetry, especially the visual environment of the descriptive poem.
2. The steps of the model reveal that the poem, the dove, is highly descriptive in its all aspects:
 - a. The poet gives details about the major concepts being described. This has given each individual concept an adequate degree of description and these individual descriptions collect to give an adequate general description.
 - b. He also draws nearly all the small parts of the view which represent a high degree of resolution, like the clear picture in which all small parts are obvious.
 - c. The description is not directed to one or two sub-scenes; the poem is in a continuous movement of the focus from the very beginning to the end. The poem covers the scene from different points of view.
 - d. The poem sticks to a single scene in which all the tackled scopes belong to a single general scope. This focus, on a single domain, satisfies the scene with description.

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